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ABSTRACT

For many library patrons, the reference desk is the logical place to begin research on a topic. The purpose of this study is to determine if patrons, given a choice of either a male or a female librarian to approach, have a gender bias when seeking information at the reference desk. A total of 100 library users were unobtrusively observed in the Kent State University Library to determine if they exhibit a gender bias when seeking assistance. During the course of this study, library users were confronted with a choice of both a male or female librarian to approach at the reference desk. The sex of the patron as well as the sex of the librarian were recorded and presented in tabular form. This study found no evidence of gender bias among library patrons seeking assistance at the reference desk. The tally instrument is included in the appendix. (Contains 23 references.) (Author/JLB)

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ED 367 371

SEEKING ASSISTANCE AT THE REFERENCE DESK: A STUDY TO DETERMINE GENDER BIAS

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Kevin R. Risner

November, 1990

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ABSTRACT

For many library patrons, the reference desk is the logical place to begin research on a topic. A total of 100 library users were unobtrusively observed in the Kent State University Library to determine if they exhibit a gender bias when seeking assistance. During the course of this study, library users were confronted with a choice of both a male or female librarian to approach at the reference desk. The sex of the patron as well as the sex of the librarian were recorded and presented in tabular form. This study found no evidence of gender bias among library patrons seeking assistance at the reference desk.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Kent State University Library can be an intimidating place for students of all levels. It consists of twelve floors and can overwhelm the average user. In addition, the library has replaced the traditional card catalog with a computerized system which is very difficult to decipher without some form of instruction. Because of the fact that college life can be a pressure-filled experience for patrons of an academic library, people approaching the reference desk do not want to compound an already stressful situation. They want someone who appears friendly and eager to answer questions.

Many factors can make up the psychological barriers that confront a patron seeking assistance at the reference desk. Some of those reasons that have been identified in the literature include patrons' fear that the question asked would be too simple (Swope and Katzer, 1972) or that it would appear to be trivial and they would be perceived as ignorant by the librarian. Kosa (1982) found that a large number of students would rather turn to their friends for help before seeking assistance from the reference librarian. She also discovered that patrons were hesitant to approach a librarian if they

felt that they would interrupt his/her work. A busy librarian discourages questions from patrons who genuinely need help.

Hatchard and Toy (1986) also concluded that a great many people have emotional difficulties in approaching others with questions. they feel tense, nervous, or insecure when seeking help, and value a friendly, out-going, personable librarian who would make the patron feel comfortable when asking a question.

Lederman (1981) found that even though students exhibit an apprehension about seeking assistance, they will eventually approach the reference desk when other strategies fail.

Other variables are related to the degree of personal warmth or inclusion exhibited by the librarian. Harris and Mitchell (1986) found that high inclusion (warm nonverbal communication) and low inclusion had an effect on how males and female rate the effectiveness of reference interviews. The psychological literature includes a large number of studies that indicate that people do have certain perceptions based upon gender. The patrons who enter the library are certainly no exeption. In addition, many are unaware of the resources available in the Kent State University Library. This author has noticed that some patrons do seem more comfortable with a librarian of a certain sex, and will actually bypass a librarian who is available and ready to answer questions and wait for a librarian who is helping another patron.

Based upon observations from the reference desk, this study attempted to accept or reject the hypothesis that library patrons will, given a clear choice of librarian, choose a female over a male. This hypothesis is made for a variety of reasons. librarianship is a traditionally female field, although the number of males in the field is growing, female librarians still comprise the clear majority. Two, patrons desire a friendly person to ask for help. Females are frequently held high in this regard. Ullian (1984) argues that women on the basis of their childbearing capacity develop a desire to help and care for others. A young girl recognizes early that she has the physical characteristics to become a mother. This encourages the development of personality traits that will fit that role. They will develop a desire to care for other people.

Jean Miller, in her book Toward a New Psychology of Women, argues that many of the traditional female behaviors, such as nurturance, sharing and empathy have been repressed in males, and are not highly valued in a male dominated society.

Females have a nuturing quality about them that may appeal to a patron suffering from anxiety when seeking information in the library. Females may be considered to be more of a teacher, and perhaps, more patient than their male counterparts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if patrons, given a choice of either a male or a female librarian to approach, have a gender bias when seeking information at the reference desk.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study a patron is defined as any person who approaches the reference desk, whether student of faculty member. No attempt has been made to distinguish students be class rank, age, or any other distiguishing characteristics.

A reference librarian is defined as a professional or paraprofessional staff member of the Reference Departments which is comprised of professional librarians, para-professionals, and graduate student reference assistants.

An approach to a librarian consists of any kind of interaction when information is requested of a librarian without attention to the nature or content of the reference request.

Limitations of the Study

Since the study is limited to the Reference Department at Kent State University, the findings are not generalizable to reference service provided at other academic libraries without further replication of the study.

II. SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

Library Research

The effects of interpersonal communication and gender in a library setting have been investigated in a few studies in the professional literature.

Reference Service Studies

An early study sought to determine the reasons why patrons do not approach the reference librarian with their questions (Swope and Katzer, 1972). In this study the researchers argued that it is frustrating for many patrons to use the library. A questionnaire was developed to interview library patrons in order to determine if there was a hesitation to seek assistance at the reference desk. The interviews took place in the Syracuse University Library near the card catalog, in the reference center, and near the open stacks. The randomly selected students were asked if they had questions concerning the library, and , if so, if they were likely to seek assistance from the library staff. The study indicated that a majority of patrons with questions would not consult a librarian. The primary reasons found included a dissatisfaction with past library service, a desire not to bother the librarian, and a feeling that the question was too

simple. In a survey at a teachers college in Australia, (Kosa, 1982) a survey was performed with a sample of over a thousand students asking if they hesitated to ask the reference librarian for help in finding information. If the answer was "yes," they were asked to explain the reason. The primary reason for hesitating to ask a reference librarian was the fear that the question would appear trivial to the librarian and interrupt his/her work. In fact, the study indicated that a busy librarian discourages questions from patrons who genuinely need help. The students also noted that their reluctance derived from not wanting to be perceived as ignorant to the librarian. The study continued to indicate that a large number of students would turn to their friends for help before seeking assistance from the reference librarian.

In another study of Australian libraries, (Hatchard and Toy, 1986) an interview technique was utilized to discover why students avoided asking the librarian for help. The students who did respond that they hesitated to ask for assistance in the library gave many of the same reasons that were found in the previous study, plus many stated a difficulty in phrasing the question or knowing the terminology of the type of information needed.

The authors argue that there are a great many people who have emotional difficulties in approaching others with questions. Some of the respondents answered that they feel

tense, nervous, or insecure when seeking help. The authors also sought responses on the type of characteristics that the library staff ought to possess in order to be effective. Not surprisingly, the students valued a friendly, out-going, personable librarian who would make the patron feel comfortable when asking a question.

A study was performed to determine the effects of Communication Apprehension (CA) on observed student subjects seeking information in the library (Lederman, 1981). This CA concerns the level of fear that a person experiences when talking to another person, in this case a librarian. The students were given a question and told to use the library as they normally would when seeking information. The students were observed, noting the resources that were utilized in the library. Some students who were determined to posses a high level of CA preferred to utilize material sources in their search for information rather than asking the librarian as the initial step. However the findings indicated that even the most hesitant of library patrons will eventually seek out a reference librarian for assistance. Some may just take a bit longer than others.

Gender Perceptions of Reference Service

In a study of perceptions of the success of reference interviews, 320 adult male and female public library patrons were shown videotaped reference interviews in which the gender of the patron and the librarian were interchanged (Harris and

Michell, 1986). In addition, the style of communication between the librarian and the person seeking information varied as well. Both the librarian and the patron shown in the videotape were professional actors. They followed a script that varied the level of warmth and inclusion shown by the librarian when assisting the patron. The male and female observers both placed a high level of importance on warm non-verbal communication when judging the competence of the reference librarian. The differences between the observers were found in the level of "inclusion" shown by the reference librarian toward the patron. The term inclusion refers to the librarian exhibiting warm non-verbal communication along with involving the patron in the search for the needed information. A librarian exhibiting a high level of inclusive behavior acts as an instructor on the use of the library materials. The study indicated that female observers tended to want assistance from a librarian who showed low inclusion in the search for an answer to a reference inquiry. However, the male observers seemed to regard low inclusive behavior as evidence of a lack of warmth on the part of the librarian. Indeed the male observers perceived the low inclusive behavior as un-professional.

In a later study, Michell and Harris (1987) sought to discover if there was a difference in the observations between male and female librarians. The study was conducted in the same manner as above with professional librarians watching the

videotatpes of professional actors conducting reference interviews. In this research the findings revealed that the librarians were tougher critics than the patrons in judging the professional behavior of the thespian librarians. The female librarians tended to be the harshest critics. They were shown to be the most critical of the reference librarians who exhibited low inclusive behavior when answering a reference question. The authors suggest that the female observers place a greater level of importance on the teaching function of reference service, that it is the job of the librarian to instruct the patron on the use of the library.

In a later study, first year library science students were tasked with evaluating reference service (Harris and Michell, 1988). This piece of research sought to determine if the type of information being sought affected patrons' perceptions of the librarian. The students were given a narrative of a reference interview and were asked to judge its effectiveness. In the scripts given to the students the following factors were varied: sex of the librarian; type of question asked; and the level of inclusion shown by the librarian in the reference interview. For example, one script may have a female patron asking a male reference librarian about home insulation, while another will describe a male patron inquiring about home birth methods. The students were then asked to judge the effectiveness of, and their level of confidence in, the librarian that useful information would be

found.

The findings of this study indicated that if a patron asked a male-type question of a male librarian, the librarian was judged to be more effective when inclusion was not exhibited. However, when a woman asked a male-type question on home insulation, the male librarian received a lower effectiveness rating by not providing any bibliographic instruction. Indeed, the student observers noted that the effective librarian gave no bibliographic instruction when patrons asked a question consistent with their traditional sex-role to a librarian of the same sex. Although the observers seemed to be biased on the type of question, the evidence of placing a level of importance on the teaching function of reference service still was evident.

Psychological Research

In the psychological literature there has been a great number of studies on the issue of sex bias in a variety of settings that are of interest to this study.

Evaluation of Professional Achievements

Research performed to measure the level of bias in the judgement of professional achievements found that the authors of academic research were judged higher when their writings were consistent with their sex-roles (Mischell, 1974). Both high school and college students were asked to evaluate professional articles. There was a tendency in this study for

the students to be biased in favor of the author whose sex matched the traditional view of the field. For example, the students frequently gave higher ratings to an article written by a woman in the field of dietetics, and higher ratings to an article on city planning written by a male author. However, the study also found that sex bias may be less prevalent as the age and level of education of the judges increases.

In an evaluation of male and female performance, subjects were tested in order to see how males and females would be evaluated performing different tasks (Deaux and Emswiller, 1974). In this study, the subjects were asked to listen to a tasked performed by either a male or female on a male or female-linked task and asked to judge whether or not the cause of successful completion of that task was based on skill or luck. The study indicated that males were more likely to be viewed as completing a task due to skill. The subjects frequently regarded the successful completion of a task by a female, particularly a male-linked task, as a result of luck or chance. While, even on the female-linked tasks, male success was recorded as skillful.

Evaluation of Teaching Methods

There have been a number of studies performed on the question of sex bias in the evaluation of university faculty.

In one such study, the authors (Feild, Holley, and Armenakis, 1976) sought to discover if teaching behaviors are evaluated differently, and if that difference is due to the

sex of the evaluator. A questionnaire was developed that listed various teaching behaviors asking the students to evaluate the method. Out of the twelve teaching behaviors evaluated, the study indicated that males tend to place a high value on the use of teaching aids, supplemental texts, and teachers who stimulated creative thinking.

In another study, (Kaschak, 1978) students were asked to evaluate the teaching methods of college professors. The methods of six professors were judged, three males and three females. They were judged in traditionally male, female and non-sex linked subject fields. The students were given narratives of six instructors describing their teaching methods. Two of the instructors were in traditionally masculine fields (business and chemistry), two in traditionally female fields (home economics and elementary education), and two in neutral fields (psychology and history). The narratives were descriptive paragraphs that were followed by a scale on which ratings could be placed. Among the items judged was the perceived level of effectiveness and excellence of the professors. The male judges were found to be more biased rating the professors on the basis of sex, while females tended to exhibit less of a sex bias. However, a majority of female students responded that when given a choice of a male or a female professor, a female would be preferable. The author suggests that female students may hold the view that they will be treated more

fairly by a female professor.

This study was expanded a few years later (Kaschak, 1981) with the same method used as in the previous study, but all the professors evaluated were described as award-winning. The study found that while sex bias did decrease among males with the this additional information, the female professors were still rated higher in the traditionally female fields of home economics and elementary education.

In another study (Unger 1979), the subject of sex bias on student evaluations of their instructers was once again researched. A student evaluation form was administered to various psychology classes with a seven point Likert scale utilized to record the students' responses. As in the other studies, the results indicated a bias based on gender. No attempt was made to record the sex of the respondents, however there was an almost two to one ratio of females to males in the psychology classes where the evaluations were administered. The findings indicated that the students gave lower ratings to female professors who were perceived as more difficult graders. Consequently, the female instructors who were considered easy graders were rated higher.

In a later study (Baslow and Silberg, 1987), over one thousand students took part and evaluated their instructors on teaching effectiveness. Again, a gender bias was noted. Males tended to rate female professors lower than their male counterparts. The authors argue that the perception that

college teaching is a traditionally male occupation may account for the lower ratings of the female professors.

Hypothetical situations were used to test variables in student ratings of professors in a later study (Kierstead, et al. 1988). The students were given a written description of an instructor and asked to imagine that they were a student in the hypothetical course. In this case they were asked to judge the importance of outside contact with the instructor. The results indicated that females who were available outside of the classroom recieved higher ratings than those who were not. Male instructors were not affected by the level of outside social contact.

The effect of smiling was also studied. Students watched a slide presentation showing males and females instructing a class. The smiling was varied in the presentation. The results indicated that smiling did not have an effect on the ratings of the males, but an unsmiling female tended to be evaluated poorly.

Finally, in a recent study (Sidanius and Crane 1989) ratings of over 400 faculty members were evaluated. A total of 9005 teaching evaluations were studied in order to judge the effect of sex on performance evaluations. Women faculty were judged to be less competent than their male counterparts in teaching effectiveness by both male and female students. In addition, female instructors were not even perceived as being more sympathetic to student needs. This study stands

out among the many studies performed in this field due to its large sample.

A different experiment to determine if students have a gender bias toward university faculty was conducted by holding a mock registration (Barnett and Littlpage, 1979). In addition to a trial schedule and a college catalog, students were given a biographical and professional summary of both the male and female professors. The students were required to register for classes, and presented with clear-cut choices between male and female instructors. The authors' hypothesis suggested that females would be evaluated more negatively, hence there would be less students registering for their classes. Given the many studies in the field, this may have been a logical assumption. However, there was no indication of sex bias on the part of the students taking part in the mock registration.

Research of Counselor Preference

In a study of psychological counseling, (Simons and Helms, 1976) the researcher sought to determine if the marital status, sex and age affect the preferences of female college and non-college students when seeking a compatible counselor. Both the college and non-college women were found to prefer women counselors. The women in the study also had different preferences in the age of the counselors. The college women tended to prefer female counselors in the 35-45 and 55-65 age range who were single. The non-college women preferred the

55-65 age range with no major inclination toward marital status.

Another study on counselor preferences attempted to determine if students have a preference when presented with a choice of a male or female counselor (Yanico and Hardin, 1985). A questionnaire was administered listing different counseling problems. Among other things, the students were asked if they preferred a counselor of a certain sex. The findings in this experiement indicated that a large majority of students had no gender preference when dealing with vocational problems. However, gender preference was shown to occur when problems of a more personal nature are discussed.

In a related study (Bernstein, Hofmann, and Wade 1987), students were surveyed at a large university and asked to rate their counselor preferences based on nine different client concerns. Not all students noted a gender bias in their choice of counselor. But among those that did register a preference, the findings indicated that male counselors were preferred, except in cases that involved problems of a sexual nature. Students tended to prefer a male counselor when dealing with vocational/academic and social/interpersonal concerns.

The findings of another study (Cooper, 1984) sought to determine if there was a same-sex preference of students utilizing the counseling services at a technical school. Among the students expressing a sex preference, there was a

clear indication in this study that many students preferred a counselor of the same sex.

The purpose of this literature search, especially the extensive citations from the field of psychology, is to show that there are indications that people do have certain perceptions based upon gender. The patrons who enter the library are certainly no exception. In addition, many are confused about what is available in the Kent State library, and may even be apprehensive about seeking out needed information.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as a field experiment. The data was collected by direct unobtrusive observation of the reference desk when both a female and a male librarian were on duty. Both of the librarians had to be free to answer questions in order for a patron to have a clear choice. If one librarian happened to be occupied with a patron while another patron approached the other librarian, the choice was not tallied because no clear choice was made. Only the choices made between two unoccupied librarians were recorded. The patrons were only observed long enough to determine their choice of librarian. Once the patron had made the choice, the observation was terminated. Both the percentages of patrons' choices of a male or female librarian and the percentages of male and female patrons approaching the desk were tallied (see tally sheet example in the appendix). The time of day was also recorded. In order to make this a viable study, 100 instances of patrons making a choice were observed and recorded. If a clear gender preference was shown by patrons this number would be enough to support the hypothesis. The reference desk was observed between the times 9:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M, Monday-Friday. These are the hours when two librarians

work at the desk. No attempt was made to record the type of question asked, only the sex of the patron approaching the reference desk and the sex of the librarian was recorded.

This researcher was limited by the fact that the schedule is constructed by a staff member in the department. The data collected were taken from random times during the seven hour period that the desk was staffed by two librarians. Percentages of both the male and female choices are calculated and presented in a tabular form. In addition, tables are presented that divide the observation of the desk into the morning and afternoon hours.

IV. RESULTS

The experiment took place over a two-week period during the summer session, from August 10th through August 24th. Since only a small portion of the KSU student body takes classes during the summer, the activity around the reference desk is not as busy. Hence, the librarians are dealing with fewer reference questions and the choice of librarian can be made more frequently.

Some constraints occurred with the data gathering. The Kent State Reference Department does not place any time restraints on librarians answering reference questions. It is not uncommon for the reference staff to spend 20 minutes or more assisting a patron, especially when activity is slow around the desk. At times, observing an hour at the desk only produced 2 or 3 instances of a patron making a choice of a librarian. Also, despite the fact that this researcher sought to observe the reference desk without being noticed, during slow periods at the desk, one, or both of the librarians would want to socialize, not only with this resesarcher, but with friends and collegues. It took longer than anticipated to gather enough data to make this a viable experiment.

In addition, the gathering of data was kept secret from

the staff at the desk to insure that the librarians would act as naturally as possible while on duty. This also had its drawbacks since reference librarians bring office work to fill their assigned time at the reference desk. In these cases, due to the amount of work that a reference librarian brings to the desk, it was possible that one librarian was deemed more approachable by the amount of attention that they are paying to the papers on the desk. This could not be helped. The only plus was that frequently both the librarians and the student assistants brought work out with them, so the study was not adversely affected.

TABLE 1.

Choice of Reference Librarian by Gender of Patron and Librarian

	Gender of Librarian			
Gender of Patron	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Male	25	25.00%	28	28.00%
Female	23	23.00%	24	24.00%
Total	48	48.00%	52	52.00%

The total number of patrons who approached the desked totaled one hundred. Broken down into figures based on

gender, males numbered fifty-two and females fourty-eight.

As the reader can see there was not any indication of major gender bias on the part of patrons toward librarians at the reference desk.

If the reader has looked ahead to the example of the tally sheet used in this experiment, the time of day was also recorded during this experiment. Taking this information, tables indicating frequencies of choices in the morning 9-12 and afternoon 12-5 are presented.

TABLE 2.

Choice of Reference Librarian by Gender of Patron and Librarian (9:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.)

Gender of Patron	Gender of Librarian			
	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Male	5	16.70%	10	33.30%
Female	9	30.00%	6	20.00%
Total	14	46.70%	16	53.30%

During the observation of the desk in the morning hours, a total of thirty patrons was observered. The totals and percentages are shown in Table 2.

Since the reference desk was staffed only between the hours of 9-5, there were more patrons observed in the

afternoon than there were in the morning, due to the fact that there were two more hours available for observation. The totals from the afternoon hours and percentages are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3.

Choice of Reference Librarian by Gender of Patron and Librarian (12:00 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.)

Gender of Patron	Gender of Librarian			
	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Male	20	28.60%	18	25.70%
Female	14	20.00%	18	25.70%
Total	34	48.60%	36	51.40%

Again, even dividing the totals by the time of day does not give any clear indication that patrons have a gender bias when approaching the desk.

V. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This findings of this experiment found no evidence of a gender bias exhibited by patrons when approaching the reference desk in the Kent State University Library.

These results tend to support the research of Barnett and Littlepage (1979) who found no evidence of gender bias in students registering for classes. Other factors in this study take precedence over gender bias, such as the time that the class is offered. In the library, patrons desire an answer to their inquiry as quickly as possible, with a minimum of discomfort. One could also argue that patrons expect quality answers from all the reference librarians at Kent State University and it makes no difference about gender as long as they deliver good service.

In the study on counselor preferences (Yanico and Hardin, 1985) the authors found no bias among students when discussing vocational concerns. A majority of the time an academic librarian only deals with a patron's class assignments and not with subjects of an embarrassing nature that may cause the patron to seek out a librarian of the same sex.

In another study of counselor preference (Bernstein, Hofman, and Wade, 1987) those that did exhibit a gender bias

seem to prefer a male counselor when dealing with vocational concerns. This gender bias did not appear in any clear pattern among the patrons approaching the reference desk.

In the study of teaching methods of college professors (Kaschak, 1978) the findings not only indicated a sex bias by the male respondents in rating college professors, but an indication that female students may prefer female professors. No major indication in this study found that a clear majority of female students prefer female librarians to direct their reference questions. True, librarians do not have the power of grading the students, but since the Kaschak study indicated that females may percieve a fairer treatment from a female professor, one might believe that it would spill over to their choice of reference librarian.

There are other reasons to explain the fact that patrons did not show a gender bias. One, the reference staff consists of friendly, personable people who seem to enjoy their work. When a patron is approaching the desk they are greeted by one of the librarians in a congenial manner. This is part of the training that is provided by the department, particularly to the Student Reference Assistants during their orientation period. Two, patrons who approach the desk want answers to their questions and really do not care about the sex of the librarian as long as they receive a response to their inquiry. As long as the librarian acts in a professional manner, the patron will approach regardless of the gender of the person at

the reference desk. A librarian providing reference service in a polite, non-judgemental manner should not be discriminated against on the basis of his/her sex.

However, librarians may be bypassed due to their lack of knowledge or their perceived lack of patience. It is important to note that some of the patrons who were observed in this experiment may have had an earlier contact with a reference librarian and actively sought out that same librarian. By the same token, a patron who recieved sub-par reference service from one librarian may never want to approach the same one with another question. Three, although librarianship has traditionally been a female occupation, more males are entering the profession. Libraries are not the only institution to open to members of the opposite sex. There are plenty of male nurses and secretaries in the workforce, even the military, which usually regulated a woman's role to the nursing corps, has opened up and actively pursued women to work in all its available occupations up, save infantry. Indeed, in South Korea, and currently in Saudi Arabia, women are on the front lines and will be expected to fight if ordered. Except for surrogate mothering, there really are no occupations that are limited to people of a certain gender.

Since this study did not indicate any clear-cut gender bias by patrons approaaching the reference desk one must look at the sample size. One hundred instances of patrons making a choice of a reference librarian may not be enough to prove

or disprove the original hypothesis. A researcher with plenty of time may find it more profitable to observe two hundred or more instances of patrons choosing a reference librarian for help. The larger the number observed, the more valid the study will be.

The psychological literature offers some ideas for further research. Studying the research on the level of bias found in judging the professional achievements of college professors by students (Mischell, 1974), one arrives at an idea. In a library setting this could be done by expanding the study to include the type of questions that are asked of the different librarians. One may find that patrons with questions dealing with elementary education may be inclined to approach a female librarian, while patrons with questions on business concers asked the male librarian on duty. This study can be performed in the same manner as above, but an additional tally sheet will be needed to record the various types of questions asked of the librarians.

In addition to the unobtrusive observation, a survey could be developed to gather information about patrons after their contact with the reference librarian is over. After recording their sex, the librarian's sex and the type of question asked, a researcher could ask them to participate in a survey of library users by asking their status (undergraduate, graduate, faculty, or private citizen), their field of study and, if the researcher is brave enough, their age.

The latter could probably be categorized in broad ranges in order not to offend anyone.

In the study to measure the level of bias in the evaluation of professional achievements by authors of academic research, the researchers found that as the level of education of the evaluators increases the level of gender bias decreases (Mischell, 1974). An academic library serves a higher educated clientele. A clear majority of the patrons observed in this study are college students and faculty. A similar study performed in a public library might yield different results. The unobtrusive observation could be performed in the children's and young adult sections as well as in the more adult departments. The public library serves such a much wider range of patrons that the findings might be more relevant to the library literature if this study could be replicated there.

If it is not gender bias that influences a patron's choice of reference librarian, there are other experiments that could be performed. A study that varies the position of the librarians, such as having one stand while the other is sitting may yield interesting results.

In the studies to determine the reasons that patrons avoid asking the reference librarian for help, (Swope and Katzer 1972; Kosa 1982) the findings indicated that a busy librarian inhibits patrons from seeking assistance. An experiment with one librarian dealing with paperwork and the

other looking approachable should not yield surprising results. However, it may cause libraries to evaluate their policies that allow librarians to bring work from their desks during their scheduled hours in the reference center. Warm non-verbal commmunication could be varied with the librarian who is not working at the desk smiling and making eye contact with patrons as they enter the reference area.

A another study of the reference desk may indicate that one librarian might receive more questions than the other because of their proximity to the enterance. The librarian seated closer to the main entrance of the reference center might be asked more questions than the other librarian on duty soley due to layout of the room . It might be simply more convenient to approach the closest librarian after entering the reference center rather than acting on any prejudices toward a certain gender. Clearly, more research can be done on patron preference.

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APPENDIX

EXAMPLE OF THE TALLY SHEET

Choice of Reference Librarian by Gender of Patron and Librarian

Date:_____ Time:_____

	Gender of Librarian	
Gender of Patron	Male	Female
Male	_____	_____
Female	_____	_____